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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000550

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: GEMAYEL TELLS WELCH UNIFIL SHOULD EXPAND
ITS MISSION

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) In a April 18 meeting, former president Amine Gemayel told visiting NEA A/S David Welch, that the rules of engagement for UNIFIL troops should be changed, and added that he wanted UNIFIL to expand its area of operations (AOE) and its mandate in southern Lebanon. UNIFIL could also be used as a means to pressure Hizballah and the Shia in general to cooperate because Hizballah was eroding the GOL's ability to provide security, he said. Gemayel also argued that the Christian representation in the Siniora cabinet should be strengthened and believed policy should attempt to counter the growing Iranian influence in Lebanon and the region. A/S Welch assured Gemayel that U.S. policy towards Syria would not change following the U.S. presidential elections. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Visiting NEA A/S David Welch, accompanied by Charge Sison, NEA/FO Staff Assistant, Pol/Econ Chief, and PolOff, met with the former president and Phalange Party leader Amine Gemayel at the Phalange headquarters in Beirut on April 18.

UNIFIL'S ROLE
SHOULD BE INCREASED

[1](#)3. (C) Gemayel supported recent remarks made by Italian Prime Minister-elect, Silvio Berlusconi, in which Berlusconi said he wanted to change the rules of engagement (ROE) for Italian troops attached to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). If UNIFIL's role was enhanced, it could do more to secure Lebanon's borders, according to Gemayel. He added that the current situation in the south appears to be very relaxed. However, Gemayel said Hizballah is eroding the GOL's ability to secure the country and that this erosion could negatively affect UNIFIL's security; therefore, UNIFIL troops should be on a heightened state of alert. Hizballah is currently re-arming within UNIFIL's AOE and altering the ROE would protect UNIFIL soldiers, pressure Hizballah, and convince moderate Shia to do more to cooperate with western nations and moderate Arab countries, according

to Gemayel.

14. (C) Gemayel said the U.N. Security Council should strengthen UNIFIL's role in Lebanon by increasing the amount of troops in the mission, as well as expanding the AOE to cover some Christian areas, such as Jezzine, where Hizballah is beginning to pose a real threat to Christian villagers due to proximity of its training facilities. Changing the ROE for UNIFIL could intimidate Hizballah and show it that the international community and pro-western Lebanese citizens were not ready to abandon Lebanon. Gemayel added that the Shia in the south, more so than the Israelis, fear a UNIFIL retreat.

15. (C) Gemayel said if consensus could not be reached over issues such as a national unity government and a new electoral law, and UNIFIL's mission could not be altered, then March 14 should elect a president by the fifty percent plus one method. Gemayel said his experience taught him that if Lebanon took such a step, the international community would stand with March 14.

HIZBALLAH ERODING
LEBANESE SECURITY

16. (C) Gemayel said it was a dilemma for the Lebanese people whether to give concessions to Hizballah to encourage it to fully join the political process. Gemayel argued that Hizballah should join the government; however, he could not imagine the two sides co-existing ideologically. He said Hizballah, with its ideology, weapons, strategy, and way of thinking, would find it hard to co-exist in a state where law

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and order dominated. Hizballah had its own form of law and order, not in accordance with the international community, according to Gemayel.

17. (C) He added that the international community should show strength against Hizballah, and if the two sides cannot co-exist, then the GOL should make it clear to Hizballah, like Iraqi PM Nuri al-Malaki made it clear to militias in Iraq, that it would not tolerate Hizballah's weapons inside Lebanese territory. Gemayel believed if Hizballah considered the international community weak it may begin to launch attacks, similar to those against the U.S. Embassy and Marine barracks two decades ago. These were tragedies that should not be repeated, therefore Hizballah must be challenged, he said.

CHRISTIAN ROLE

18. (C) Gemayel said he told PM Siniora on April 17 that there was a need to reshuffle the cabinet in order to enhance the role of Christians in the government. According to Gemayel, March 14 Christians have to be ready to counter Michel Aoun in the 2009 parliamentary elections and reshaping the cabinet would give March 14 Christians the ability to convince their individual constituencies that they were enhancing the role of Christians in Lebanon. He then referred to Finance Minister Jihad Azour, saying that he was a good man, but most Christians consider him Saad Hariri's Finance Minister more than they do a strong Christian leader. Gemayel said that he did not know if he was able to convince PM Siniora to reshuffle the cabinet, but he hoped Siniora would consider doing it.

19. (C) He added that the future of Christians in the Middle East is in jeopardy, and referred to the growing number of attacks targeting Christians in Iraq. It is important for the U.S. and Europe to protect the Christians in the Arab World, Gemayel added. Decentralization may be another option that the different sides should consider Gemayel argued. He referred to Austria and Finland as good examples and said

decentralization would help strengthen GOL institutions and would keep Lebanon free and at peace and would convince the Shia that the rest of Lebanon is not a threat to them (although did not elaborate).

IRANIAN AND SYRIAN
INFLUENCE IN LEBANON

¶10. (C) In addition, there was an ever increasing need to counter Iranian influence in the region and in Lebanon in particular, he said. Gemayel noted that Iran is an undemocratic theocracy that desires nuclear weapons. There is also a need to enhance the ability of the GOL to gain control of all Lebanese territory, so that it is possible for the GOL to counter the growing Iranian influence within the country, Gemayel said. He also believed that it was important Syria establish diplomatic relations with Lebanon, and Syria should attempt to increase its cooperation with Lebanon in a positive manner as opposed to its negative influence in the country.

U.S. POLICY TOWARDS
SYRIA, NOT GOING TO CHANGE

¶11. (C) A/S Welch said he was in Lebanon to tell the people of Lebanon that U.S. policy with Syria has not changed, despite the current trip by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter to Syria. A/S Welch called Syria a tunnel for weapons from Iran into Lebanon and noted that Syria remains a problem for the U.S. in Iraq. Syria is a headquarters for extremists, and it is interfering in the negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinian Authority (PA), A/S Welch said. U.S. policy towards Syria was not likely to change, no matter the political party in power.

¶12. (U) A/S Welch has not had the opportunity to clear this

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